

Revolutionising recruitment in the homeless sector

Manchester Homeless Partnership facilitated by the Employment Action Group

This report is made up of notes from an event that was held by the Manchester Homeless Partnership on Revolutionising recruitment in the homeless sector. The event was facilitated by the Employment Action Group. It was attended by a range of different services including people with lived experience of homelessness. It includes information on the benefits of involving people with lived experience and how to overcome barriers. It also features three different organisations who involve lived experience in the recruitment process; Manchester City Council, Shelter and the Booth Centre, each of whom describe their approach.

Benefits to organisations for involving people with experience of homelessness in their interviewing processes:

- Giving people a chance to contribute to the services they access
- Playing a part in making sure the right people are being employed (good listening and life skills, empathetic)
- Developing people's talents
- Helping organisations understand the importance of having the right people
- People with experience of homelessness have a certain quality, and a knack for spotting a good candidate.
- People who have sat on interview panels then often get jobs themselves
- It can help with funding applications
- We employ better staff
- It becomes 'how we do things' – not just within recruitment but generally
- It creates a stronger workforce and sense of community
- It allows us to make decisions together

Benefits to people who sit on interview panels, feedback from volunteer panel members:

- "I had an input in who was appointed"
- "I contributed exactly the same as other panel members"
- "I enjoyed the experience and being part of a team"
- "My opinions were valued and respected"
- "Inspired me to find work in the sector and gave me more insight into the recruitment process which will help me when applying for jobs in the future"
- "I learnt new skills"
- "My self-esteem and self-confidence has improved"
- "We know what questions to ask and can get 'real' answers – not just what management would want to hear"

- “We can employ different types of people with more suitable personalities and behaviours, and more common sense than qualifications”
- “We got an insight into what motivates the kind of people who apply for these types of roles”

All attendees discussed the barriers to people being involved in recruitment and solutions:

Barriers	Solutions
Confidentiality/data protection	Work with Human Resources and take out personal information when short listing applications
Jargon/Acronyms	Use plain English
Process is too complicated (real or imagined)	Simplify processes where possible and provide training Have informal interview and/or group interviews
Financial (volunteer panel members not paid)	Look at providing sustenance, travel expenses and gift vouchers and certificates
Involve Young People in the process	Get buy-in from management
Commitment of volunteer panel members	Use different volunteer panel members to give feed-back, can be beneficial to organisations
Volunteer Panel members not trained	Do mock interviews
Uncomfortable environment	Look at doing interview in a community setting/and or where the successful candidate would be working
Matrix system doesn't give candidates the opportunity to demonstrate empathy	Help volunteer panel members to ask real life scenario questions

How to do it:

Manchester City Council's Homeless Services Team – Gareth Clarke

- We did a big recruitment drive last year for 50 new jobs in the homelessness sector, 28 of which were in the new Longford Centre
- All of the interviews had mixed panels which included people with personal insight into homelessness
- If we get the staffing wrong, the quality of the service will suffer
- Life experience is more important than knowing the right 'buzz words'
- You get a better sense of the character of a person by how they respond to different people and different questions
- You can have 'shirts' deciding how a service should run, however the ideal way to improve services is by listening to people who are or have used them – not by doing a 'review'

Steps we take :

1. Identifying the right people to be panel members is key – not about experience of interviewing, but that they can bring something extra to a panel.
2. Get to meet with the prospective panel members, talk about the organisation, what we are trying to do and how they can assist with the aims and ambitions.
3. Training on interviewing skills, is key, as it equips the individual with skills and confidence. Run through an interview scenario, or conduct a mock interview, highlighting good practice or different ways to approach a question or query. Go through the actual questions for the interview, explaining what we are looking for and how to get the right response from the applicant. Ask them if they have specific questions they want to ask. Go through all the paperwork and explain what the marking system is i.e. 1-6 scoring matrix, and how we would score a particular answer.
4. Shortlisting – There are 2 ways in which to approach this:
 - i) The organisation does the shortlisting and only shares the application with the panel member, which will not contain personal information, such as addresses. This is the preferred method.
 - ii) The panel member with experience has a DBS check and once cleared takes part in the shortlisting process. Although it needs to be clear any info will not be discussed or shared outside of the interview process.
5. On the day of the interview, set up early, sit down with panel members with a coffee/tea and go through the days running agenda. Ensure the panel members are okay and discuss any anxieties they may have. Allocate questions to each panel member and run through the questions.
6. Once the interviews have started, let each member of the panel introduce themselves.
7. During the interviews, where a panel member may have difficulty, provide support and assist with the question or query.
8. During the scoring/selection process, involve the panel member, as they need to own the decision, how do they feel about specific answers, did they feel the candidate was strong, why?
9. All the panel members agree who is the best candidate.
10. Ensure expenses are covered such as travel and lunch for training and interviewing days.
11. Allow for any additional travel time or breaks when setting up the interviews.

How to do it:

Shelter - Sarah Walters

We have people with lived experience on every interview panel in Shelter; that means all roles for all grades; from management to delivery

- Candidates need to be able to relate and connect
- It has provided a cultural shift for ICM, it's not just an objective we have to meet but a fundamental value of the programme
- People with lived experience of homelessness can 'see right through candidates' who don't know what they're talking about

- We make assumptions without realising that they will question and challenge
- It allows people on the panels to define themselves differently; this is my contribution

Steps we take:

1. Interviewees meet two panels, professionals within Shelter and GROW Trainees (people with experience of homelessness)
2. Both groups worked together to write the job description and job advert.
3. Professional panel members negotiated with HR to incorporate the ideas of GROW Trainees
4. Both groups are involved in short listing candidates, setting and asking the questions at interview
5. Both groups mark interviews together
6. Role play incorporated into the interview with a GROW Trainee
7. Grow Trainees have recorded a video to talk about their experience of working with Shelter

How to do it:

Booth Centre – Amanda Croome

We have a 2 stage interview process;

Stage 1: Candidates spend a morning in the Centre and have an informal interview and discussion with a group of people who use the Centre

Stage 2: formal interview with CEO and Trustees

These 2 stages are given equal weight in terms of making the decision about who to employ.

* How does the interview/discussion with people who come to the Centre work?

On the morning of the interviews or the day before we ask 4/5 people if they would like to help us to recruit the new worker.

We have an informal meeting where we explain what the post is that we are recruiting for and that we want their help to find the best person to employ. We ask them what they think are the important things for that role. For front line workers they usually say the most important things are;

Empathy – They want people who will be able to relate to their situation. This doesn't necessarily mean that the person has to have experienced homelessness – they may have a friend or family member who has had problems of various sorts.

Approach – if they would be a good listener and if they would support the person to get the change in their life that they want to achieve.

The ability to cope with confrontational situations – as people really value staff being able to help to keep them safe and the service calm. We usually get them to think of a scenario that they could put to the person of how they would cope with a particular thing.

We then help them to formulate a set of open questions using their own words and not using the usual interview jargon. They agree between themselves who is going to ask what questions + how they will introduce themselves etc. They then conduct the whole interview which usually develops into a bit of discussion at the end. A worker from the stage 2 interview panel sits and make notes but doesn't form any part of the interview or discussion.

After each interview/discussion the staff member will ask people for feedback around the main issues that they have identified. We don't ask people to score the interviews or to make a decision about which candidate they think should get the job, instead we record the positives and negatives about each person in each area.

After the formal interviews with the CEO/staff and Trustees the staff member (usually the CEO) who has been in the informal interview feeds back about what the group have said and this information is considered alongside the formal interview responses. We have never employed someone where the feedback from the informal interview was negative and where people do fairly equally in the formal interview then the feedback from the informal interview will be the deciding factor.

After the person is appointed we tell the people who did the informal interview and explain how their views were taken into account and thank them for taking part and then ask them to help with the induction for the new worker.

We vary the approach a bit in different circumstances. For example when we recruit art tutors then we only have the informal interview and they make the decision, guided by a worker who sits in on the interview.

This approach allows us to involve a group of people who better represent the range of people who use the Centre, rather than just having one person on a formal interview panel. We can include people with multiple and complex needs, including people who are currently rough sleeping and people who have literacy or language issues etc. and they can ask the questions which are important to them, rather than us asking them to ask our questions. The group don't need to have access to any confidential information e.g. The candidate's addresses, phone numbers, work histories, criminal records etc. – as this isn't needed for what they are wanting to do.

This approach takes a bit of extra time – in that we are conducting 2 sets of interviews and need to prepare and feedback to the informal panel but the benefits far outweigh the extra time that we need to spend.